

# MeshPipe: A Python-based Tool for Easy Automation and Demonstration of Geometry Processing Pipelines

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**Abstract:** The popularization of inexpensive 3D scanning, 3D printing, 3D publishing and AR/VR display technologies have renewed the interest in open-source tools providing the geometry processing algorithms required to clean, repair, enrich, optimize and modify point-based and polygonal-based models. Nowadays, there is a large variety of such open-source tools whose user community includes 3D experts but also 3D enthusiasts and professionals from other disciplines. In this paper we present a Python-based tool that addresses two major caveats of current solutions: the lack of easy-to-use methods for the creation of custom geometry processing pipelines (automation), and the lack of a suitable visual interface for quickly testing, comparing and sharing different pipelines, supporting rapid iterations and providing dynamic feedback to the user (demonstration). From the user's point of view, the tool is a 3D viewer with an integrated Python console from which internal or external Python code can be executed. We provide an easy-to-use but powerful API for element selection and geometry processing. Key algorithms are provided by a high-level C++ library exposed to the viewer via Python-C++ bindings. Unlike competing open-source alternatives, our tool has a minimal learning curve and typical pipelines can be written in a few lines of Python code.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Point-based and polygonal-based models are the central part of an increasing number of popular applications including 3D scanning (e.g. via photogrammetry tools), 3D modeling (e.g. Blender, Tinkercad), 3D printing services, 3D publishing tools (e.g. SketchFab) and desktop-based or AR/VR-based interactive applications.


The availability of free or low-cost options for these technologies have significantly increased their user base, in areas such as art, architecture, cultural heritage, construction and entertainment. This means that a growing number of users are not 3D modeling/3D processing experts, but 3D enthusiasts, 3D hobbyists and professionals from other disciplines.


A common requirement in all applications above is the need to perform some geometry processing on the 3D models before they become useful for the target application. Consider for example a cultural heritage project for digitizing and publishing an art work. A 3D model can be created by taking

photos and then using open-source MVS+SfM tools such as COLMAP (Schönberger and Frahm, 2016; Schönberger et al., 2016). However, the resulting model will include background objects that have to be removed and missing parts that have to be repaired. If a high-quality setting was used, the model will also require some optimizations (simplification, normal mapping) to be ready for publication. Different applications often require different processing pipelines, although it makes sense for users to share ready-to-use pipelines for specific tasks.

Today, there are many open-source libraries and tools supporting geometry processing. Some examples we review in the next section are CGAL, VCG, PMP, PCL and libigl (libraries) and MeshLab, MeshMixer and OpenFlipper (applications).

The libraries above provide efficient implementations of common geometry processing algorithms (analysis, repairing, simplification, remeshing, smoothing, parameterization...) and obviously excel in terms of automation. Unfortunately, they have a substantial entry barrier for non-experts, and most of them require compilation, which makes it difficult to iterate different pipelines or experimenting with associated parameters. Some libraries have been com-

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piled into JavaScript (e.g. MeshLabJS, PMP) to run in a browser, but these incur a substantial performance penalty and still require some background on geometry processing.

Besides libraries, open-source tools provide a graphical user-interface and thus offer immediate feedback on the geometry processing operations being applied. The main drawback is the lack of automation features. Some tools do offer automation (e.g. MeshLab), but filters have an overly long interface and iterating with different pipelines is not straightforward. Automation is key for applying the same pipeline to a collection of similar models (e.g. scanned objects with similar properties). Another issue is the size limitations when it comes to process huge models such as those produced with 3D scanning pipelines. First, most open-source tools require the model to be kept in-core. Second, even if fits in core memory, some operations like face selection (cleaning) or mesh parameterization (texturing) take a substantial amount of time on huge models. Trying different pipelines on a simplified version is an option, but some steps (e.g. face selection) cannot be reused on a different mesh and thus working with huge meshes is a tedious task. Finally, some of these tools have been designed for 3D professionals (e.g. Blender, MeshLab) and thus require some training.

In this paper we propose a tool to overcome these limitations. We support the fast creation, re-use and sharing of custom geometry processing pipelines (automation) through a simple high-level Python API. We make extensive use of default parameters to simplify the use by non-experts. We also provide a powerful element selection mechanism so that any algorithm (deleting, smoothing, simplifying...) can be applied to the desired part.

The tool itself is a 3D viewer with an integrated Python console from which internal or external Python code can be executed (see Figure 1). Processing operations can be also selected via the GUI, which automatically inserts the Python call with appropriate parameters. User interactions such as lasso selections can be saved and reused on a different version (e.g. higher quality) of the model. Custom pipelines can be created with any editor, and the tool keeps track of changes to automatically load the pipeline. This way we support rapid iterations while providing dynamic feedback to the user (demonstration). In order to maximize performance, key data structures and algorithms are implemented in C++, and accessible via Python-C++ bindings. The library in turn provides typical geometry processing algorithms through feature-rich libraries such as PMP and PCL.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. Sec-

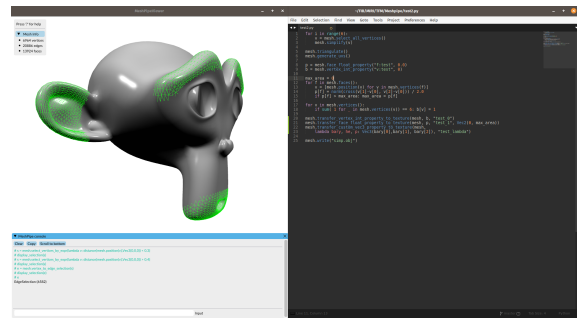


Figure 1: Intended usage of the *Meshpipe* viewer: side by side with a text editor.

tion 2 reviews related work on geometry processing software and libraries. Sections 3 and 4 describe the design of the C++/Python API and the 3D viewer. Implementation details are given in Section 5. Section 6 shows further script samples and results. Finally, Section 7 concludes the paper and outlines future work.

## 2 PREVIOUS WORK

The variety of tools and libraries that cover the geometric processing of 3D models is quite wide. Some features are common to most of them (such as simplification). Others are only found in a subset of them. Some tools serve to expose functionalities of a specific library. In any case, the goal of tools is not the same as that of libraries. In the following two subsections we analyze several of the available tools and libraries.

### 2.1 Tools

#### Meshmixer

*Meshmixer* is a closed source software owned by Autodesk. Its main focus is to provide tools for mesh processing and "clay-like" sculpting. It has a very powerful set of tools and a 3D viewport that helps the user visualize the mesh properties as well as perform all sorts of modification tasks.

Over the last year it has incorporated many features related to 3D printing, such as support generation for manufacturing processes and integration with various 3D printer models in order to provide a one-click setup to start the prints. However, there is no support for any kind of automation or scripting.

#### MeshLab

*Meshlab* (Cignoni et al., 2008) is a free and open source tool built upon *VCGLib* 2.2 that excels in the

acquisition and reconstruction of meshes. It has great tools for working with 3D scanned data and for obtaining a clean and usable mesh from it. Additionally, there is a web based variant called *MeshLabJS*, that replicates many of the features found in the original software in a web browser environment, thus requiring no local installation.

Unlike *Meshmixer*, this tool introduces the concept of “filter scripts” which allow the user to define a processing pipeline to be reused in as many meshes as needed. However, these pipelines are fixed, they only contain a list of predefined steps and parameters and there is no possibility of changing them depending on the properties of the mesh.

### OpenFlipper

*OpenFlipper* (Möbius and Kobbelt, 2010) is a very powerful mesh processing suite. It provides all the basic elements of a mesh processing software: viewer, selection and basic tools and data structures (based on *OpenMesh*, see section 2.2), while exposing a complete plugin development API.

This plugin system can load both C++ and Python plugins to extend its functionality as needed. However, there is not a clear common interface for tools and, for example, not every interactive action has a one to one mapping with an API call, making it hard to automate some tasks.

## 2.2 Libraries

### OpenMesh

This free and open source library is developed by the *Visual Computing Institute* in the RWTH Aachen University. It provides the bare basics for developing a mesh processing algorithm and recent versions also include implementations for mesh decimation, smoothing and subdivision. It implements a half-edge based data structure (Kobbelt et al., 2002) for storing mesh information as well as some infrastructure for storing mesh properties. This makes it suitable for any job that requires fast queries for traversing the mesh and/or generating new geometry but it does not include any of the more advanced mesh processing algorithms. OpenMesh is a C++ library but Python bindings are also provided.

### VCGLib

*VCGLib* (Cignoni et al., 2004) is the base of most of the tools developed by the *Visual Computing Lab* and, as such, it is at the heart of Meshlab. A C++ open source library, it allows for the manipulation,

processing and displaying of triangular and tetrahedral meshes. Its functionalities include simplification, smoothing, parameterization, reconstruction, and several others. The library is also well known because of its use in The Digital Michelangelo Project.

### CGAL

The *Computational Geometry Algorithms Library* (CGAL) is by far the most extensive open library in the context of computational geometry. The project is developed via a collaborative effort from a community of developers working at research institutes, universities and companies and it includes over a hundred modules, all providing some algorithm or core functionality to this huge ecosystem.

It is important to keep in mind that mesh processing is only a part of the whole computational geometry scope, so only a subset of the CGAL modules will be actually useful when developing a mesh processing program. Still, CGAL has the highest amount of geometry processing (Loriot et al., 2019b) techniques and algorithms implemented out of the box. Some of this algorithms include mesh subdivision (Shiue, 2019), simplification (Cacciola, 2019), deformation (Loriot et al., 2019a) and parameterization (Saboret et al., 2019).

### PMP

The *Polygon Mesh Processing* library (PMP) (Sieger and Botsch, 2019) is an MIT-licensed mesh processing toolkit. It has its origins on the *OpenMesh* half-edge implementation but evolved a lot from it. It provides all the usual tools of any modern mesh processing library: a core mesh data structure plus a set of well known algorithms to work with it. It also provides a clean and simple 3D viewer.

### PCL

*PCL* (Rusu and Cousins, 2011) is a powerful point cloud processing library that is developed by a large group of companies and universities. The library implements algorithms for feature detection, filtering, registration, reconstruction, segmentation and visualization of point clouds. With the goal of simplifying development *PCL* is split into a set of smaller modules. This helps reduce the library’s footprint in platforms with reduced capabilities.

### libigl

*libigl* (Jacobson and Panozzo, 2017) is a geometry processing library with a wide array of imple-

mented algorithms that is built upon *Eigen* (Guennebaud et al., 2010). As such it expects model information to be encoded as matrices. This allows to easily express many geometrical problems as sparse discrete differential geometry operators and finite-element matrices. *libigl* also has python bindings that make it possible to express geometry processing tasks in this language. The library may be used to compute several discrete geometric quantities and operators, apply shape deformation, parameterize models, smooth them, and many others.

### 2.2.1 PyMesh

PyMesh is a Python library for rapid prototyping of geometry processing scripts. It provides common mesh processing operations through a number of state-of-the-art open source packages. PyMesh focuses on code simplicity as we do, but uses native Python data structures. The platform has no associated viewer and thus interactive operations such as mouse-driven selection are not supported.

### 2.2.2 Geogram

Geogram is a multi-platform C++ programming library of geometric algorithms. It provides a mesh data structure, spatial search data structures, standard geometric predicates and geometric algorithms such as Delaunay triangulation. Geogram is used by Graphite, an experimental 3D modeler supporting pointsets, surface meshes and volumetric meshes (tetrahedra and hybrid meshes). It features state-of-the-art algorithms for mesh repair, remeshing and reconstruction.

### 2.2.3 Geometry-central

Geometry-central (Sharp et al., 2019) is another C++ library of data structures and algorithms for geometry processing. It features algorithms for computing various geometric quantities on surfaces, and advanced geometry-processing algorithms such as computing geodesic distances and direction fields.

### 2.2.4 Py3DViewer

(Cherchi et al., 2019) is a new research-oriented Python library for quickly prototyping geometry processing algorithms. It supports editing and viewing both surface and volume meshes. Unlike MeshPipe, Py3DViewer uses Python libraries such as Numpy for computing and PyThreeJS for visualization.

## 3 API DESIGN

The *Meshpipe* API has three major components: the *Mesh* class, the *Selection* class, and a set of extension modules that are built on top of the other two classes. The *Mesh* and *Selection* classes work together to allow users to traverse a mesh and select parts of it whereas the various extension modules provide different operations that can be applied to the whole mesh or a selection of it (see Figure 2).

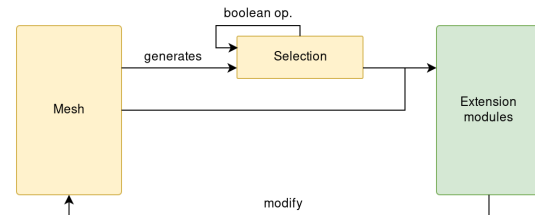


Figure 2: Main components of the API.

We decided to use this global organization because we want to keep a clean and simple core library with only the essential tools while at the same time make it easy to extend the library to add new algorithms or mesh processing techniques.

### 3.1 The Mesh Class

#### Mesh Representation

The *Mesh* class is the essential core of the *Meshpipe* library. It is based on the classic half-edge data structure, which allows for quick traversals of the mesh while keeping the memory requirements relatively low. This representation stores all topological relationships on half-edges (from now on h-edges). H-edges are split (i.e. an edge connecting vertex A and vertex B becomes two directed h-edges from A to B and vice versa). Each h-edge references one of its two vertices (the vertex it points to), the face it belongs to, the next h-edge inside the face, and the opposite h-edge. Conversely, vertices reference one of its outgoing h-edges and faces reference one of the h-edges bounding it.

Listing 1 shows a subset of mesh traversal methods supported by the API. The central element is the h-edge, as it allows to navigate to other h-edges as well as other elements in the mesh. The rest of the navigation methods are just helper methods that do the necessary conversions to move between different elements and neighborhood types.



```

# Get the next h-edge within the face
next_halfedge(halfedge)
# Get the opposite h-edge
opposite_halfedge(halfedge)
# Get vertex at the h-edge origin
from_vertex(halfedge)
# Get vertex at the h-edge destination
to_vertex(halfedge)
# Get edge from a h-edge
edge(halfedge)

# Get iterator over vertices in a face
vertices(face)
# Get one h-edge from the given face
halfedge(face)

# Get one outgoing h-edge of a vertex
halfedge(vertex)
# Get iterator over adjacent vertices
vertices(vertex)
# Get all faces incident to a vertex
faces(vertex)

```

Listing 1: A subset of mesh traversal methods supported by the API.

### Selecting Elements

The *Mesh* class is also in charge of generating the most basic selections, see Listing 2. These are meant to be the basic building blocks which can be later combined or modified using the methods in the *Selection* class. As an example, a call to the `select_boundary_vertices()` method generates a selection including all the vertices that lay in the mesh boundary. This selection can be expanded using the `expand()` method in *Selection* or combined with other selections using the provided Boolean operations.

Another interesting method in this family is the `select_vertices_by_expr()`. This is a flexible operation since it takes as parameter an arbitrary Python expression, that gives users full power to select faces, edges, h-edges and vertices by whatever criteria they want to implement.

Finally, the *Mesh* class contains a set of user-interaction related methods. These allow for reproducibility of user actions independently of the mesh, see Section 4.1 for more details.

Another task of the *Mesh* class is to convert between selection types. A user may want to select a set of vertices and after that, select all the edges that are connected to at least one of the selected vertices. The methods in Listing 3 perform this kind of conversions. They have some parameters that slightly change the conversion behavior. For example, when converting from a vertex selection to a face selection a minimum

```

select_self_intersecting_edges()
select_self_intersecting_faces()
# the following methods are available
# also for faces, edges and halfedges:
select_all_vertices()
select_boundary_vertices()
select_non_manifold_vertices()
select_vertices_by_expr(expression)
select_vertices_inside(volume)
lasso_select_vertices(camera, lasso_points)
click_select_vertices(camera, point)

```

Listing 2: Subset of selection methods. There are similar versions of these methods for every topological element: vertices, halfedges, edges and faces.

number of selected vertices can be specified so that only faces with two (or however many) vertices in the original selection get selected.

```

vertex_to_edge_selection(sel, min_verts)
vertex_to_halfedge_selection(sel)
vertex_to_face_selection(sel, min_verts)
halfedge_to_vertex_selection(sel)
halfedge_to_edge_selection(sel)
halfedge_to_face_selection(sel, min_he)
...

```

Listing 3: Subset of selection conversion methods.

### Element Properties

The API allows to attach arbitrary properties to mesh elements: faces, edges, h-edges and vertices. Properties can be of different types and come from different sources. As an example, we can store color information for every vertex in a mesh that has been reconstructed using photogrammetry.

It is important that this kind of data is easily accessible both for reading and writing and that we only store in memory the properties we actually use. Adding a new property to a mesh returns a *Property* type object that can be accessed as an indexed container and each element can hold a value of one of the following types: int, float, Vec2, Vec3 and Vec4. Listing 4 shows some of the basic methods for adding, retrieving and removing properties from a mesh, and Listing 5 displays a little usage example.

### Mesh Generation and Manipulation

In order to generate a mesh from scratch only two operations are required: the addition of vertices and the addition of faces (see Listing 6 for an example).

The *Mesh* class also includes many more utility methods such as getting the total number of vertices, getting the position of a vertex and checking whether

```
# Float property per-vertex
add_vertex_float_property(name, default_value)
get_vertex_float_property(name)
remove_vertex_float_property(property)
has_vertex_float_property(name)
vertex_float_property(name, def_val)
```

Listing 4: Property management methods. Equivalent methods exist for every combination of data type and element.

```
# Allocate a Vec3 property per-edge
prop = mesh.add_edge_vec3_property("my_prop")
# Access the edge property like array
prop[e] = Vec3(1.0, 1.0, 1.0)
```

Listing 5: Simple usage example of properties in Python.

```
# Available methods
add_vertex(position)
add_triangle(v0, v1, v2)
add_quad(v0, v1, v2, v3)
add_face(vertices)

# Example
mesh = Mesh()
v0 = mesh.add_vertex(Vec3(0.0, 0.0, 0.0))
v1 = mesh.add_vertex(Vec3(1.0, 0.0, 1.0))
v2 = mesh.add_vertex(Vec3(0.0, 1.0, 0.0))
mesh.add_triangle(v0, v1, v2)
```

Listing 6: Mesh generation methods.

a vertex belongs to the mesh boundary. See the code repository for further details.

### 3.2 The Selection Class

The *Mesh* class holds all the mesh data and allows for some low level modifications, but the bulk of the mesh transformations are done via operators and modifiers. These operators can often be applied to the whole mesh or just some parts of it. For example, we may want to smooth only some part of the mesh or completely delete some elements while keeping the rest of the mesh intact.

In order to specify which elements will be modified and which not, we introduced the *Selection* class. There are four different types of selection, all inheriting from the same *Selection* class: *VertexSelection*, *HalfedgeSelection*, *EdgeSelection* and *FaceSelection*. Each one of the classes holds a list of all the selected and unselected elements of its type and provides a way to iterate the selected elements. On top of that, the *Selection* class holds some methods to select or

deselect elements, a group of topology-based operations (i.e. grow or flood the selection), and a set of Boolean operators to generate more complex selections (see Listing 7).

```
# Selected elements iterator
selected()
# Check if selected
is_selected(element)

# Select/deselect list of elements
select(elements)
deselect(elements)

# Topology operators
grow(mesh, steps)
shrink(mesh, steps)
flood(mesh)

# Boolean operators
invert()
subtract(selection)
combine(selection)
intersect(selection)
```

Listing 7: Subset of *Selection* methods.

Listing 8 shows a typical use case where we want to detect small disconnected components of a mesh (e.g. generated from a scan) and remove them.

```
to_delete = mesh.empty_vertex_selection()
for v in mesh.vertices():
    if to_delete.is_selected(v): continue
    s = mesh.empty_vertex_selection()
    s.select(v)
    s.flood()
    if s.n_selected() < min_threshold:
        to_delete.combine(s)
mesh.delete(to_delete)
```

Listing 8: Example of selection and deletion of small connected components.

### 3.3 Extension Modules

Extension modules provide typical geometry processing operations. Here we discuss only a subset of the supported algorithms.

#### Simplification

The simplification module currently uses edge-collapse mesh simplification (Listing 9). The edge collapse method can take various parameters that determine the complexity of the simplified mesh as well as its quality.

```
from meshpipe import MeshSimplification

MeshSimplification.simplify(mesh,
    selection, n_vertices, aspect_ratio,
    edge_length, max_valence, normal_deviation,
    hausdorff_error)
```

Listing 9: Mesh simplification example.

## Analysis

Our current implementation supports various curvature metrics (minimum, maximum, mean and Gaussian) as well as per-vertex, per-face and per-halfedge normal computation, see Listing 10.

```
from meshpipe import MeshAnalysis as ma

# Curvatures are stored per-vertex
prop = ma.compute_min_curvature(mesh)
prop = ma.compute_max_curvature(mesh)
prop = ma.compute_mean_curvature(mesh)
prop = ma.compute_gaussian_curvature(mesh)

# Normals are also stored as a property
prop = ma.compute_vertex_normals(mesh)
prop = ma.compute_face_normals(mesh)
prop = ma.compute_halfedge_normals(mesh, angle)
```

Listing 10: Mesh analysis example.

## Parametrization

Our current implementation uses a LSCM parametrization (Lévy et al., 2002), which tries to reduce distortion by minimizing angle deformations and non-uniform scalings, see Listing 11.

```
texture_size = mp.parametrize(mesh,
    texels_per_unit)
```

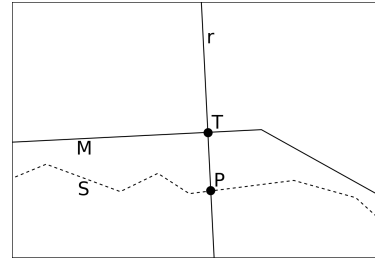
Listing 11: Mesh parametrization example.

## Property Transfer

A typical use case is to generate a simplified version of a mesh and transfer the geometry detail from the original mesh to the simplified one. We used a simple yet effective method for transferring properties between meshes (Cignoni et al., 1999). In order to compute the appropriate value for each texel in the transfer texture we first need to find its corresponding position and surface normal on the simplified mesh. We get this information by unfolding all the triangular faces into two temporary textures: one containing the positions and the other containing the surface normals.

All the values in these textures are interpolated using the texel's barycentric coordinates to obtain a set of smooth and continuous values across each face surface.

Once we know the position  $T$  and surface normal  $N$  of a texel, all we need to do is find the point  $P$  of intersection between the line  $r$  parallel to  $N$  that goes through  $T$ , and the full detail mesh. The value of the texel we are computing will be the same as the value of the intersection point on the original mesh. This value on the original mesh can be automatically computed by interpolating a mesh property or by a user-defined lambda function.

Figure 3: Property transfer diagram. M is the simplified mesh, S is the original mesh,  $r$  is the intersection line and P is the final sampled point.

By defining a custom lambda function users not only get more control over the interpolation method; they can also define properties that have different values at a texel; something which is not achievable with the property system since values are always attached to a mesh element rather than a surface point. Both property transfer options are shown in Listing 12.

```
# Default property transfer, similar
# methods for every basic type
m.transfer_vertex_float_property_to_texture(
    source_mesh, target_mesh, prop, texture_path,
    value_range = Vec2(0, 1))

# Custom property definition, similar
# methods for every basic type
m.transfer_custom_float_property_to_texture(
    source_mesh, target_mesh, prop_lambda,
    texture_path, value_range = Vec2(0, 1))
```

Listing 12: Subset of property transfer methods.

## Point Cloud Processing

Although we focused on mesh processing, the API also supports point processing algorithms, such as finding all the points within a radius, finding the  $K$  nearest neighbors.

## 4 VIEWER DESIGN

Our 3D viewer (see Figure 1) provides a quick testing iteration environment as well as some user interactive tools (e.g. lasso selection, mouse based deformations).

### 4.1 Supporting Fast Testing Iterations

When developing a mesh processing pipeline, usually at some point one parameter needs to be tweaked or some changes need to be made iteratively until a good solution is found. In these cases, testing iteration time is very important. Testing iteration time can be defined as the amount of time that passes between making a change and being able to verify its effects. Typical steps involve compiling the processing pipeline, waiting for the mesh to be processed, switching to a 3D editing software and loading the pipeline's result. This slows down the testing process considerably, so we wanted to minimize iteration times as much as possible.

#### Mesh-independent Code

Very often, when developing a processing pipeline, only a subset of the real input data is used. For example, the developer may want to focus on a specific part of the input mesh or just wants to use a simplified version of it in order to reduce processing times.

Once the pipeline is setup and working for the reduced input data, the developer proceeds to test the pipeline on the real/whole data set. *Meshpipe* tries to help this whole process as much as possible.

Every mouse driven operation that can be performed in the 3D viewer has its own translation on the Python API. This API calls are displayed in the 3D viewer console every time the users perform an operation, so they have the option to copy the Python code and paste it directly on their pipeline script.

All the interactive tools API methods are designed to be mesh-independent. That means the operations are not defined in terms of the mesh geometric elements but in terms of the current point of view in the 3D viewer and the mouse movements performed by the user. As an example, the lasso select tool could have been implemented as a viewer-only operation. Knowing the current camera parameters and the path traced by the user, we could check for all the elements that lie inside the lasso area and call `select_elements` on an empty selection. That would mean that any change on the current mesh would completely invalidate this operation: the API call would no longer select all the elements in the lasso area because some elements may have moved or the

indices could be completely different between to different meshes.

Instead, we added the `lasso_select_vertices` method to the *Mesh* class (see Section 3.1), along with similar methods for all the element types. These methods only receive as parameters the camera settings (position, rotation, FOV, etc.) at the moment of the operation, and a set of screen-space points that form the lasso selection path. With this information we can reproduce the original operation independently of any topology changes or even on a completely different (e.g. remeshed) model.

This property makes *Meshpipe* very suitable for the previously stated workflow: start with small and simple meshes and keep adding complexity until the whole input data is used. This helps users focus on specific problematic areas, or simply speeds up the development process by having lower processing times until a good pipeline is developed and is ready to be tested on the real data set.

#### Python API Bindings

Another way to reduce iteration times is to completely skip the compilation of the pipeline. For this reason, we decided to implement the Python API bindings. Python is an interpreted language, which means there is no need to compile the program to a language native to the CPU. The interpreter adds some performance overhead, but the benefit of skipping compilation largely compensates the performance cost, especially when working with not-final (smaller) meshes, as in the intended workflow.

#### Result Inspection

So far we proposed solutions for two steps of the typical testing iteration cycle. The Python bindings get rid of the compilation time, the mesh independent operators allow for working with smaller data sets therefore reducing processing time, so only one step is left to tackle: the inspection of the pipeline results.

There are many great tools available that allow for mesh inspection (see section 2.1) but all of them require the user to step out of the development environment, perform whatever steps are needed to load the wanted mesh (usually 2 or more clicks), and only then be able to take a look at the pipeline results.

Instead, *Meshpipe* offers an integrated solution. The same application that runs the processing pipeline has a 3D viewport that can display whatever mesh is being processed as well as the process results. Apart from the convenience of not leaving the development environment just to take a look at a mesh, this system has two other advantages: it can display intermediate



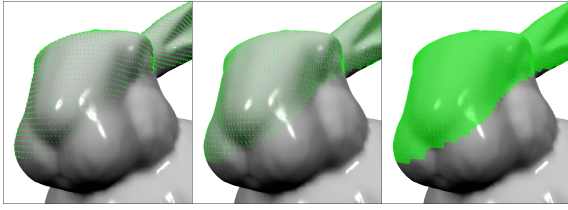


Figure 4: Display of different selection types. From left to right: vertex selection, edge selection and face selection.

states, such as selections or properties and it does not need to store any mesh files, since the rendered mesh is already stored in RAM.

Intermediate states are important as they can help understand what is happening internally when developing a processing pipeline. The same way a debugger can help during the development process by allowing the user to see the state of the program during execution, the *Meshpipe* viewer can be used to visualize what elements belong to a specific selection or display the values of a mesh property by using color scales, as well as overlay a given texture over a mesh. All these display operations can be done either during a pipeline execution or from the viewer’s console.

## 4.2 User Interface

Figure 1 shows a screenshot of the intended way of using the viewer. Having two windows open side by side: one with a text editor and the other one with the viewer itself allows the developer to view and easily modify the code while having quick access to the viewer display and console.

The 3D viewport includes all the basic interactions present in many 3D editing software: zoom, rotation and panning. All these interactions can be performed using the mouse or using keyboard shortcuts. It can display wire-frame and point cloud versions of the loaded meshes and also vertex, edge and face selections (see Figure 4). Finally, it can also display texture data on top of the rendered mesh as well as any of the properties defined on the mesh.

The *Meshpipe* console works the same way as any other python console. It has a global context and allows for executing any Python statement, including variable definitions, that then can be used in future statements. The executed lines are printed in green (see Figure 5) and if the statement returns any value it will be printed in black. Any errors in the input statement or in the executed script will be displayed in the console using a red font. Finally, any mouse operations performed by the user will print their equivalent API call to the console in a dark blue font.

This console can be used to test simple operations

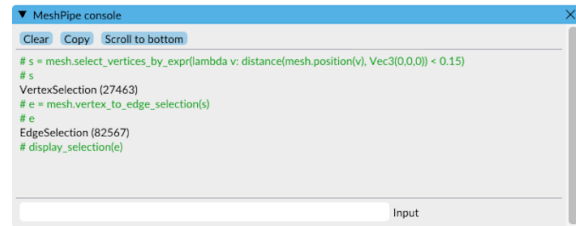


Figure 5: Console usage example.

without having to create a script file. Additionally, it has some extra defined methods that give access to the display capabilities of the viewport. Methods like `display_selection` or `display_texture` change the way the mesh is rendered, adding information in the form of overlays or changing colors depending on the mesh and texture data.

## 5 IMPLEMENTATION

We wanted an easy to use scripting language for the pipelines but at the same time have a robust and performant implementation of the core data structures and algorithms. For that reason, we decided to use C++ as our core language and Python for pipeline scripting.

C++ is a widely used language in the field of mesh processing. The fact that it compiles directly into native code makes it a great candidate for this type of performance-reliant tasks. In addition to that, there already are many C++ based toolkits for mesh processing development, so we can use one of them as the base for our system and add any missing features or algorithms on top of it.

In our case, we decided to use the *Polygon Mesh Processing* library (Sieger and Botsch, 2019) for two main reasons: it has a very flexible mesh data structure and it includes a basic 3D viewer that we can build upon. This library serves only as a base and many algorithms and features are implemented by others or by us, for example: the point cloud API or the whole selection system.

In order to expose all the functionality to Python we started evaluating various possible solutions. There are plenty of tools to generate the necessary glue to interface Python and C++, many of which automatically generate bindings from the unedited C++ source. We did not want that, we wanted to be able to control which parts of the API were exposed to Python and which were not. *PMP* includes various basic mesh processing algorithms, but in some cases their implementation does not fully suit our needs. In order to give the user the best possible experience,

we added external libraries that overlap with *PMP*'s functionality. Exposing everything to the Python API would mean that some functionality would be duplicated, making the API harder to use.

For that reason, we decided to take advantage of the *PyBind11* library (Jakob et al., 2017). It gives us the control we need while, at the same time, being relatively easy to work with. Binding code is extremely simple: just a class declaration and a series of method calls to define what methods will be available in the Python API. On top of that, it also supports the definition of C++ vectors as native Python lists as well as automatic casting between Python and C++ objects.

Although this automatic casting is very convenient, it also has a performance cost. Every time a variable is converted from a Python object to its C++ counterpart or vice-versa the glue code takes a bit of time to do the casting. While this is barely noticeable for a single conversion, it can slow down the execution if the conversions happen on every iteration of a long loop. For that reason we have been very careful to minimize the automated castings. By using constant references wherever possible, we can ensure that an object lives entirely on the C++ side or the Python side, but sometimes the conversion is inevitable. In our case all the methods that take a lambda function as an argument are significantly slower than similar methods that can avoid the conversion.

Our viewer uses *PMP* boilerplate viewer implementation. We added code to display the various selection types (see Figure 4), and the Python console, which we implemented using *IMGUI*, a simple and highly extensible "immediate mode" UI library.

## 6 RESULTS

Even though *Meshpipe* is still a prototype, it is already usable for a large variety of tasks. Simple tasks such as selection, simplification, remeshing and attribute preservation take a few lines of code and have been presented throughout the paper. In this section we present two more complex use examples (see repository for full source code).

### 6.1 LOD Grid Generation

A widely used technique to improve performance on large scenes is to have multiple levels of detail (LOD) for each object inside them. This way, we can render the closest objects with the highest amount of detail, while the furthest ones are rendered using simpler LODs.



Figure 6: Top: original mesh. Bottom: visualization of the 5 simplified cells generated by the pipeline.

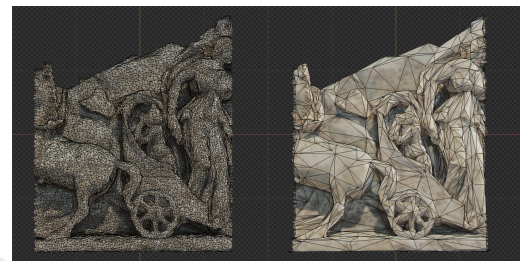


Figure 7: Detail comparison. Left: original. Right: simplified.

In our use case we also want to use levels of detail, but instead of a large scene, we want to apply it on a large scanned mesh. We put ourselves in an hypothetical situation where we are developing an interactive museum application. It should allow the user to focus on any part of the art piece (in our case an ancient Greek sculpture), so the amount of detail needs to be kept as high as possible to enable close-up inspection.

We want to create a simple pipeline that splits the input mesh into a grid of smaller meshes (see figure 6) and, for each of them, generates a high and low level of detail version of them. This would allow our hypothetical application to render only the focused part in full detail, while keeping the context of the rest of the piece by rendering the surrounding parts in low detail. You can find the full pipeline Python code in the supplemental material.

This pipeline has two configurable parameters, the variables  $m$  and  $n$ , that define the amount of cell subdivisions in each axis. For our test model we have chosen a grid of  $5 \times 1$ , since the model is quite elongated. We iterate over each cell computing its bounding box, then select all the faces belonging to it and extract this selection as a new separate mesh. Then, for each extracted mesh, we generate a lower detail version of it using the simplification module.

In order to avoid artifacts where two cells join together, we take advantage of the fact that we can specify which vertices can be collapsed. We first generate a boundary selection and then invert it, this will en-



Figure 8: Comparison of the original mesh and all the simplified cells together. Top: original. Bottom: simplified cells.

sure that the boundary of the mesh will remain intact while the rest of it can be freely simplified.

Once we have the simplified version of a cell, we use the property transfer module to produce two textures: one color map and one normal map. These will be used by the final application to render the low detail meshes with correct colors and more detailed illumination respectively.

With this simple pipeline, we reduced the 125k vertices of the original mesh to about 6.5k vertices (see Figure 7) while keeping most of the original detail (see Figure 8) and, most importantly, having a completely automated pipeline. If we wanted to process a different mesh, all we would have to do is change the grid size to an appropriate value and execute the pipeline.

## 6.2 Generation of Brick Mortar

Another practical example of *Meshpipe*'s capabilities is the generation of a mortar mesh that fills in the gaps between a wall of bricks. This example is inspired by a real project that was developed in our research group. During the planning of an architectural project CAD designs are usually simple surfaces that represent the overall shape of the final building. When the project advances to production, more detailed models are created, even to the point of modeling every individual stone.

When visualizing the interior of such a model, the gaps in between the bricks reveal the outside elements. So the goal of this pipeline is to generate a mesh that covers all the mortar gaps in a stone model. This can be achieved with a simple processing pipeline that can be found in the supplemental material.

The algorithm first generates two neighborhoods: the topological neighborhood and the distance neighborhood. The first gives, for each vertex, all its topologically adjacent vertices; and the second one all the vertices that lay close to it. With these two sets of neighbors we look for loops of four vertices: if we

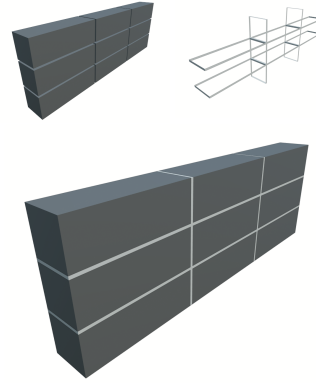


Figure 9: Brick mortar generation results. Top left: input mesh. Top right: generated mortar. Bottom: merged result.

can reach the same vertex using two different links (distance  $\rightarrow$  topological and topological  $\rightarrow$  distance) then we can create a face joining all the involved vertices.

We do a similar check for distance  $\rightarrow$  distance pairs of links in order to fill the little square gaps that appear at the intersection of four bricks. The result is a full coverage of the mortar gaps (see Figure 9). There are some extensions to the algorithm that can handle staggered brick walls, but they have not been included in order to keep this example short.

## 7 CONCLUSIONS

We have presented a new tool that supports easy automation and demonstration of geometry processing tasks. Despite the myriad of tools available, we could not find any existing software or library that focused exactly on that: quick prototyping and pipeline reusability. The tool has a suitable visual interface for quickly testing, comparing and sharing different pipelines, supporting rapid iterations and providing dynamic feedback to the user. Key algorithms are provided by a high-level C++ library exposed to the viewer via Python-C++ bindings. Unlike competing open-source alternatives, our tool has a minimal learning curve (thanks to the high-level API and the menu providing access to API functions) and typical pipelines can be written in a few lines of Python code.

A key point is that every interactive operation has an equivalent API call that will appear on the application's console once applied. This will allow the user to save the corresponding Python code and use it in an automated pipeline without having to manually perform the same operation. This feature was inspired by the Blender modeling system, but our API is designed to fully reproduce all operations in an inter-



active session, including e.g. mouse-based selection.

A clear route for improvement is to add new extension modules. On the other hand, the 3D viewer lacks some features such as layer support, that we will add in upcoming versions. We also plan to enhance the Python console by adding an automatic completion feature, speeding up even more its usage and making the API more discoverable.

**Repository.** Source code for our tool and supplemental material is available in the following Git repository: <https://gitrepos.virvig.eu/jfons/meshpipe>.

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